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“That Ideal Conception of One’s Own Personality”:
Interpreting the Encounter with One’s “Other” in “The Secret Sharer”

TANAKA Kazuya

Introduction

Joseph Conrad’s “The Secret Sharer” is regarded as his “most famous and frequently anthologized short story” (Knowles and Moore 336). The plot is straightforward. The first-person narrator is a newly appointed young ship’s captain who lacks confidence about his first command. He by chance sees a stranger swim to his ship at night. The man is Leggatt, a first mate on the *Sephora*. Leggatt has accidentally killed a colleague during a storm to save his ship. Leggatt, who is consequently excluded from the sailors’ world, escapes to the narrator’s ship. Immediately after they meet, their resemblance leads the narrator to believe that Leggatt is his “double.” The young men are almost the same age; their physiques are similar (“My sleeping-suit was just right for his [Leggatt’s] size” [180]); and they both have been trained on the *Conway* (181). The narrator thereupon sympathizes with Leggatt and conceals him from the others. He accordingly acts in a way deserving of a captain in order to prevent his subordinates from noticing his uneasiness about his “double.” The narrator finally manages not only to let Leggatt escape from the ship but also to self-confidentially demonstrate the professional “maturity of command” by showing great seamanship in the last scene (Kerr 48). “The Secret Sharer” is therefore regarded as a tale of the narrator’s mental growth and “initiation” into the sailors’ world as a captain (Simmons 168). In addition, as Albert J. Guerard (27) and Jakob Lothe (58-59; 62) argue, the novella has no Conradian time-shifts. This chronology, linear and easy to understand, has also contributed to the popularity of the short story.

The novella is, however, complicated by its unique first-person narration for two reasons: the narrator's recognition of Leggatt as his "double"; and the representation of his acquisition of self-confidence and maturation as a captain. The narrator's attitude to Leggatt's crime is in itself interesting. As his essays *The Mirror of the Sea* and *A Personal Record* show, Conrad, originally a sailor, stresses maritime discipline. The narrator, however, decides to hide Leggatt, which violates his duty as a captain. Hence, according to Lothe (65) and Robert Hampson (192), the narrator's morality can be brought into question. Furthermore, although the narrator insists "on the bond of doubleness which seems to exist," the two men's "physical resemblance" is so frequently mentioned that it is "suspiciously overblown." The narrative thus "produces what appears to be a generic ambiguity in the text" (Erdinast-Vulcan 39-40). The narrator's sympathetic view of Leggatt the murderer as his double, accordingly, seems to imply an "interior outlaw-self," externalized by Leggatt and in contradiction of maritime laws (Guerard 26). We are thereby led to examine whether or not Leggatt is the narrator's double.

It should also be remembered that the first-person narrator is an unreliable narrator: the "ultimate truth of" his or her "statement cannot be by any means ascertained" (Yamamoto, "Hospitality" 255). In addition, the narrator recalls his days with Leggatt "at this distance of years" (193) and puts the events in order so that the narrative has no time-shifts. This chronologically linear narrative implies that he carefully handles his own story. The narrator's ambiguous stance on Leggatt, hence, tempts the reader to "move beyond the captain's 'point of view'" (Richardson 307).

As for the narrator's representation of his maturation, one factor goes against the traditional realistic *Bildungsroman*. According to M. M. Bakhtin (21-23), in *Bildungsroman* the hero "emerges" (becomes mature) with the passage of a longer period of time. Leggatt, however, insists that he should leave the narrator's ship on the "fourth day"

from their meeting (202), and he departs the “next night” (206). The narrator hence seems to reach his maturity as a captain as well as to develop self-confidence within only five days.

The content of this “maturity” is noteworthy. Bakhtin points out that *Bildungsroman* deals with the “image of *man in the process of becoming*” (19; italics original). Although the narrator at first lacks confidence about his “position of the fullest responsibility,” he has already harbored “that ideal conception of one’s own personality every man sets up for himself secretly” (175). He actually achieves this “ideal” in the last scene by demonstrating his competence, which cannot be gained within five days. In short, “The Secret Sharer” describes neither the narrator’s “process of becoming” a full-fledged sailor nor his mental growth. Rather, the novella represents him as an already competent sailor who is insecure and does not know how to prove his ability. “The Secret Sharer,” thus, does not belong to the tradition of *Bildungsroman*. It is therefore necessary to consider how the narrator’s rhetoric leads the reader to feel that this story delineates the captain-narrator’s growth. This consideration of the dynamics of his narration would elucidate how his theatrical interpretation of his meeting with Leggatt allows him to dramatize the way to demonstrate his ability to command his ship.

Taking into consideration the narrative structure, I reconsider how the narrator identifies Leggatt as his double and narrates his own process of maturity. Traditional interpretations do not go beyond the point that the narrator’s references to Leggatt as his double are in fact ambiguous. This paper argues, however, that the narrative alludes to Leggatt as the narrator’s “other.” The narrative in fact represents not only that their physical or mental similarities are doubtful, but also that Leggatt is an ungraspable person for the narrator. Nonetheless, the narrator regards Leggatt as his *Doppelgänger* in accordance with his own desire to have someone with whom he can share his worry about his command. I thus claim that “The Secret Sharer” shows how

the narrator interprets and accepts the days with his "other" by handling the impact of their encounters in his own discourse about maturity.

I. The Narrator's Self-Consciousness

Let us first focus on the narrator's representation of the landscape at the beginning of the story, which embodies his deliberate narrative:

On my right hand there were lines of fishing-stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences, incomprehensible in its division of the domain of tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned forever by some nomad tribe of fishermen now gone to the other end of the ocean [. . .]. (173)

The narrator seems to clarify the setting for his story, but he cannot precisely understand his surroundings: while using "resembling," he depicts the "fishing-stakes" as "mysterious," "incomprehensible," or "crazy." This passage in fact resonates with his self-consciousness that he is "insecure at the start" (Guerard 21), and that "something" is "not open to rational knowing" (Miller 241). In tandem with this puzzling style, his uneasiness is heightened by the non-European setting: South-east Asia. His ship, "anchored at the head of the Gulf of Siam," has "just left" the "mouth of river Meinam" (173-74). Conrad's contemporaneous European readers must have expected the novella to depict the narrator's adventure, although this expectation is later frustrated.

The reader is thus confused by this start. In fact, the narrator has "been appointed to the command only a fortnight before" and does not "know much of the hands forward." He even regards himself as a "stranger to [him]self." He is the "youngest man on board (barring the second mate)," and his novicehood compels him to wonder how to be "faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality" (175). He repeatedly and meticulously stresses his uneasiness about his position.

The novella hence stimulates the reader to feel that although their situations are different, the narrator and Leggatt, who has been excluded from the sailors' world, are in such a situation that they easily share a sense of "strangeness."

At the same time, the narrator's "eccentric" actions further contribute to his strangeness (178). Despite being a captain, he voluntarily offers to be in charge of "an anchor-watch," which causes his subordinates' "astonishment." He actually cares for his crew, who have "had plenty of hard work" and "very little sleep" (176). Nonetheless, he leaves the watch no less than three times: to go below to get a cigar; to haul up the rope side-ladder, by which later Leggatt boards the ship; and to bring a sleeping-suit for him. Each of these absences can endanger the ship, and the "official punishment" was "death" (Richardson 309). These "eccentric" and "strange" actions persuade the reader to accept two apparently unnatural things: first, the captain's unusual decision to conceal Leggatt, who swims naked to the ship at midnight and confesses his crime; second, their "mysterious communication" (180) whose "celerity and nonchalance" are "surprising" (Casarino 219). The narrator, thereby, "confidently" evaluates Leggatt's crime as the result of a "[f]it of temper" (181). The narrator even feels as if Leggatt were as "identical as [their] clothes" and "no homicidal ruffian" (181).

II. Leggatt's "Otherness" and "Ghostly" Aspects

Nevertheless, the narrative implies that the two young men are by no means "identical," and that, in fact, Leggatt is the narrator's "other": the person ungraspable for the narrator. The narrator continuously refers to Leggatt as his "double": for example, "a double captain" (184); "the secret sharer of my life" (191); "my second self" (192). This repetition, however, can be interpreted as embodying the narrator's intuition and obsession with viewing Leggatt as his "double." As a matter of fact, the narrator says that Leggatt is "not a bit like me, really" even the first time they talk (184). We should recall that their encounter was

"in the night" (181). When the narrator sees Leggatt, sleeping on his bed, as "my other self," Leggatt "roll[s] over on his back" and lies "with his face nearly hidden" by "one arm across his eyes" (189). As Brian Richardson points out, considering the low level of light, the narrator's recognition of his "double" seems "to be strangely deficient in the quality of uniqueness: perhaps half the men in the ship, had their faces been similarly obscured, might have looked like" Leggatt (312).

Despite the unlikely possibility of their similarity, Leggatt's words arouse the narrator's sympathy. Of particular consequence is the repetitive use of the word "understand." There are occasions in which Leggatt might be discovered by others, but he and the narrator narrowly deal with them. Leggatt, however, finally insists that he "shall go," as if this were a part of his strategy for persuading the narrator: "you have understood [me] thoroughly. Didn't you?" The narrator then admits that he "may truly say that I understood," and that "my hesitation in letting" Leggatt "swim away from my ship's side had been a mere sham sentiment, a sort of cowardice." Leggatt also says, "As long as I know that you understand," or "It's a great satisfaction to have got somebody to understand" (205-06). The key here is that Leggatt starts the repetition of the word "understand." This implies the possibility that Leggatt's phraseology "maneuver[s]" and "infect[s]" the narrator (Richardson 313). "Understand" is repeated also when they talk about how Leggatt is to escape. At the end of their conversation, the narrator says that he "only hope[s]" he has "understood, too." Leggatt replies, "You have [understood]. From first to last" (209). In other words, the repetition of "understand" suggests that Leggatt is dominant in the relationship between him and the narrator.

Leggatt's "otherness" is, actually, intimated immediately upon his entrance into the narrative. When Leggatt climbs up the ladder, the narrator notices a "faint flash of phosphorescent light," which seems to "issue suddenly from" the stranger's (Leggatt's) "naked body" (178-79). When barely able to see the stranger's "pair of feet" or "broad livid

back immersed right up to the neck" in "a greenish cadaverous glow," the narrator recognizes him as "complete but for the head" and a "headless corpse" (178). The point to note here is the ghostly delineation of Leggatt: his "sleeping suit," lent by the narrator, is also "ghostly grey" (181).

The delineation of Leggatt as a ghostly person is a key to considering the relationship between the narrator and Leggatt. Studies on "The Secret Sharer," including recent influential ones by Richardson or Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, have tended to emphasize ambiguity of the representation on Leggatt: whether or not Leggatt is the narrator's double. This paper asserts, however, that the novella, by describing his ghostly aspects, meticulously emphasizes that Leggatt is beyond the narrator's comprehension and is consequently his "other."

It is worth quoting here Jacques Derrida's interpretation of ghosts in Karl Marx's work. Placing Louis Bonaparte and his contemporaries in historical perspective, Marx refers to them as "the ghost [*Gespenst*] of the old revolution." Marx "often aims at the head" of the ghost because he thinks that the "figures of the ghost are first of all faces" and it "is a matter then of masks" or "of a helmet and a visor" (141; italics original). Derrida's reference to the "visor" is doubly remarkable. Before focusing on the importance of ghosts in Marx's work, Derrida deals with the ghost of Hamlet's father with particular attention to the ghost's visor. He argues that the specter "looks at us" through the visor, although we cannot see "this Thing [Hamlet's father]" in "flesh and blood." Our relationship with the ghost is "asymmetry." Derrida names this the "*visor effect*" (6; italics original). This "effect" is at work in the case of Leggatt: the narrator cannot see his head, but Leggatt sees the narrator's "head looking over" at him when climbing up the ladder (188). In the first place, "ghosts" are "certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living either to us, in us, or outside us" (Derrida xviii; italics original). Leggatt should hence be regarded as the narrator's ghostly and incomprehensible "other."

Leggatt is actually represented as a person beyond the narrator's understanding, which is alluded to by the asymmetrical aspects of their relationship. As is mentioned above, the narrator's view of Leggatt seems to imply his own "interior outlaw-self" (Guerard 26); yet feeling anxious about how to hide Leggatt, the narrator never forgets his occupational responsibility. In the end, after they discuss Leggatt's departure, the narrator realizes that his "future" would "go irretrievably to pieces in any mishaps to" his "first command" (208). Leggatt, by contrast, stays calm despite his crime. As Kaoru Yamamoto points out ("Hospitality" 259), Leggatt even "always" drinks the narrator's "early morning coffee" (202).

Furthermore, Derrida's idea elucidates the narrator's uneasiness. Derrida asserts that the very young Marx's dedication in *The Difference in the Philosophy of Nature of Democritus and Epicurus* is a "filial" one, by comparing it with the words of Hamlet's father's spirit when addressing his son. Derrida contends that it is "always to the father, the secret of a father that a frightened child calls for help against the specter" (132). Derrida's assertion throws into relief the narrator's "strangeness." Two father-like figures appear around him: the first mate on his ship; and Archbold, who is the captain of the *Sephora* and Leggatt's former superior. They are veteran sailors with whiskers, which embody their "particular brand of masculinity" and trigger the narrator's "distaste" (Perel 120) as whiskers echo the two sailors' "belonging to the patriarchal society" (Kozak 330). On the other hand, the narrator is "untried as yet by" the "fullest responsibility" as captain (175). Having no father-like mentor and lacking confidence to prove his competence, he has to deal with the matter of Leggatt, his ghostly "other," by himself.

III. The Narrator's Understanding of Leggatt's Impact

The narrator, however, is not simply in the uneasy situation concerning his relationship with Leggatt or the other sailors. In consider-

ing the narrator's lonely position, this paper reassesses how his interpretation of his own encounter with Leggatt functions in the narrative. Doing so will allow us to realize the narrator's way of dramatizing his maturity and handling the impact of his "double" in the last scene.

Let us consider how the narrator is sympathetic towards Leggatt. Stress should be placed on the narrator's tendency to imitate Leggatt. When Leggatt "rest[s] a hand on the end of the skylight [of the captain's room] to steady himself," "[o]ne of" the narrator's "hands, too, rest [s] on" its "end" (183). As Nidesh Lawtoo puts it, they "become doubles because they face one another." The narrator's insistent expression of their doubleness resonates with his own intention to be "symmetric" to Leggatt (79). The narrator's depiction of his actions which follow Leggatt, thus, induces readers to accept his view of Leggatt as his "double." He tends to produce a theatrical atmosphere around his process of understanding Leggatt and his representation of his own consequent maturation.

The narrator's desire to dramatize his maturing process is also embedded in his conversation with Leggatt. When Leggatt decides to leave the ship, he tries to persuade the narrator to "maroon" him, although at first the narrator disagrees with Leggatt: "Maroon you! We are not living in a boy's adventure tale" (205). This embodies Conrad's "experiments with the genre of boys' adventure fiction" as in *Lord Jim*, which describes the adventure and downfall of Jim in Southeast Asia (Perel 117). The "maroon" must have been appealing to Conrad's contemporaneous readers, who read the passage on the "Gulf of Siam" at the beginning of the novella. Leggatt's crime and the narrator's concealment of him, however, go against the adventure tradition, in which heroes uphold moral values and comradeship. The narrator's comment above, accordingly, exemplifies both his "refusal to see his [Leggatt's] actions as those characteristic of boys' adventure fiction," and his own "discomfort with the tradition and requirements of the genre" (Perel 125). The narrator's "refusal" of the adventure tradition and his

violation of sailors' moral code ironically clarify his struggle to recast his encounter with Leggatt into a narrative related to his maturation. His response to Leggatt therefore brings to light how he comes to understand the function of his encounter with Leggatt and thus connects his experience with his maturity. The novella hence indicates that the narrator is not simply vulnerable to Leggatt's influence but, in fact, interprets by himself the impact of their meeting on his process to acquire confidence to command his ship.

The novella alludes to the narrator's deliberate and self-conscious narration, together with its opening passage about his uneasiness of his situation. When concealing Leggatt in his stateroom, the narrator explains its peculiar structure. That "cabin" has "the form of the capital letter L, the door being within the angle and opening into the short part of the letter." Accordingly, "any one opening" the door, "unless he stepped right inside, ha[s] no view of what I call the long (or vertical) part of the letter" (184). A point worth noting is, however, the narrator's introductory remark about his room: "It must be explained here" (184). As Yamamoto asserts (*From* 112-13), this phrase serves to allow the reader to vicariously experience the narrator's tactics to hide Leggatt and, as a result, even to share in his thrill and sympathy towards his "double."

The narrative strategically functions as well to hide matters inconvenient to the narrator and, thus, to gain the reader's sympathy. This strategy is well represented by the narrator's attitude towards Archbold, whose search for Leggatt is a threat to the narrator. He indeed remembers Archbold in detail: his "thin red whisker all around his face"; a "rather smeary shade of blue in the eyes"; "one leg slightly more bandy than the other." Despite this tenacious description, the narrator says that he is not certain about Archbold's name: "(it was something like Archbold—but at this distance of years I hardly am sure)" (193). This use of brackets exemplifies the narrator's cautious attitude towards his own narrative.

Furthermore, the narrator's uncertain memory can function to blur the possibility that the "narrator has confessed without confessing" in order to prevent Leggatt from being hauled "before the law" (Miller 235). As a matter of fact, in contrast to the narrator's uneasiness and dishonorable defense of Leggatt, Archbold only carries out his duty as a captain in accordance with "the ideal code of the sea," which Conrad himself emphasized (Hampson 194). The narrator admits that he cannot "heartily" receive Archbold "for psychological (not moral) reasons" (196). He even says that it "is not worth while to record" Archbold's "version" of Leggatt's murder (193). As critics argue (Yamamoto, *From* 119; Richardson 309; Miller 239), this omission serves not only to prevent the reader from knowing the alternative version of the murder case, but also to consequently retain the reader's empathy for the narrator. The narration thus persuades the reader to focus on his "psychology" as sympathetic to Leggatt rather than the moral importance placed on Archbold's duty.

Taking into account the narrator's tendency to dramatize his experience, this paper hereafter attaches special importance to the function of the last scene. He decides to "stand in as close as I dare" to an island called Koh-ring so that Leggatt can escape easily, despite a great risk of shipwreck (208). The narrator's action and his interpretation of the scene embody his ways of handling the effect of his encounter with Leggatt and, in consequence, impressing his maturity upon us. The two key motifs, the contrast between the narrator's and Leggatt's actions on their respective ships, and the narrator's representation of Koh-ring Island and his floppy hat, are responsible for the narrator's self-reflection.

IV. The Differences between the Two Ships and Their Captains

Concerning the contrast between the two ships, as Cedric Watts puts it, the novella represents an "ethical Janiformity": "situational symmetries" which "yield ethical contrasts, likeness, and paradoxes"

(28). Although the circumstances of the two ships seem to be different, they are chiasitic in the way that they are both "imperiled." On the *Sephora*, which faces a storm, the "captain [Archbold] is fearful," but the "first mate [Leggatt]" is bold enough to save it (Watts 29). On the narrator's ship, which approaches "too close" to the Koh-ring, the first mate laments that the ship "will never get out" (212), but the captain-narrator manages to maneuver the ship back to safety. The first mate seems to be "deprived of the moral support of his whiskers" and cries, "My God! Where are we?" (212). As Lawtoo asserts (87), his words, together with his repetitive "Bless my soull," echo those of Archbold, who believes that the *Sephora* was saved "[u]nder God" (195). Despite being more experienced sailors than the narrator and Leggatt, these two experts are "fearful" in the face of danger.

These comparisons serve to underscore the narrator's "inheritance" of inner strength from Leggatt and consequent development of self-confidence. The key lies in the narrator's treatment of his first mate and ship. In reacting to the mate's cry, "Lost!," the narrator "sternly" says, "Be quiet" (212). Here the word "sternly" resonates with Leggatt. Throughout their encounter, despite the strange situation where Leggatt swims naked to the narrator's ship, Leggatt's "good voice" is "calm and resolute" and embodies his "self-possession" which "induce [s] a corresponding state" in the narrator (179). With this acquired calmness and self-control, the narrator "becomes (the) double, assimilates the qualities of the double," and he finally "occupies the position of authority necessary to successfully confront a catastrophic situation" (Lawtoo 86).

An interesting parallel also exists between the narrator and Leggatt, in terms of their physical reactions to impending danger. When the first mate laments the situation, the narrator catches the mate's arm and goes "on shaking" it. The narrator says to him, "'Ready about, do you hear? You go forward'-shake-'and stop there'-shake-'and hold your noise'-shake-'and see these head-sheets properly overhauled'-"

shake, shake—shake” (213). “Shake” appears here no less than six times. Leggatt has also “shaken” his colleague (Watts 29); Leggatt has killed his insane shipmate by grabbing his “throat” and “shaking” him “like a rat” (182). Of more importance is that both the narrator and Leggatt “shake” their colleagues to save their ships: the narrator aims to force the ship away from Koh-ring; Leggatt aims to save the *Sephora* from the storm.

In addition to the resonance concerning the narrator’s and Leggatt’s physical responses to their dangers, attention should be paid to the other two factors which emphasize the parallel of the two sailors’ situations: echoes and shadows. The narrator’s ship moves “in the shadow of the land”; his “tone ha[s] a borrowed loudness reverberated from the height of” Koh-ring; his word “‘Hard-alee!’ re-echoe[s] ominously under the towering shadow of Koh-ring” (212-13). According to Lawtoo, “Echoes and shadows are mimetic tropes” and “suggest” that the narrator is “an echo of the subject” and his “identity” is “plural-singular.” Thus while the “possibility of shipwreck is nearing,” he “embodies Leggatt’s qualities of authority by echoing his voice and reproducing his action” (86-87). The narrator’s case is, however, different from Leggatt’s. While Leggatt has killed his shipmate and been excluded from the sailors’ world, the narrator succeeds in handling the ship and avoiding danger. He thus not only builds self-confidence as for his “first command” (214) but also obtains his subordinates’ trust and respect which impress his maturity as a captain on the reader. The echoes and shadows thus serve to illuminate the narrator’s assimilation of Leggatt’s features.

When comparing the two young sailors, we should not overlook Leggatt’s physical ability, which should be contrasted with the narrator’s initial lack of self-confidence. Leggatt once says that he won “a prize for swimming [his] second year in the *Conway*” (185). He in truth swims “over a mile” to the narrator’s ship even at night (187). Leggatt is accordingly an “expert swimmer” (Stallman 281), and the narrator does not need to dangerously “shave the land as close as possible” for

him (211). Nonetheless, the narrator carries out such a hazardous procedure because he regards it as "a matter of conscience," or his devotion to Leggatt (211). As H. M. Daleski puts it, the narrator takes the risk in believing it to be "a necessarily preliminary to his taking effective possession" of the ship "as its captain." In reality, he manages the risky maneuvers, and this consequently proves his competence as a captain to his ship's crew. He therefore uses these maneuvers as "an extreme test" to prove and dramatize his effectiveness as captain (Daleski 319).

V. Representation of Koh-ring and the Narrator's Hat

Apart from the comparison of the two ships, the other matter also echoes the narrator's chance meeting with Leggatt. This is his symbolic representation of the two things: Koh-ring and the narrator's floppy hat. They resonate with the description of Leggatt as a ghostly person and also allow the narrator to deal with Leggatt's impact on him.

The first point to note is the narrator's depiction of Koh-ring. When approaching it, the ship is enveloped with "[s]uch a hush" that it "might" be "a bark of the dead floating in slowly under the very gate of Erebus," the Greek deity of darkness (212). The narrator thereby compares Leggatt's swim to Koh-ring with the dead people's sailing on the "River Styx," across which they "are ferried [...] in a boat by Charon, the son of Erebus" (Stape and Simmons 435). The supernatural element adds to the ghostly quality of Leggatt—a "headless corpse" (178). His appearance and departure are dramatized in a singularly similar way.

The last scene is made even more spectacular through the narrator's representation of his own floppy hat, which he "ram[s]" on his "other self" at their parting (210-11). After bringing the ship close to Koh-ring, the narrator "remember[s]" that he is "a total stranger to the ship," but he has to sail the ship away from the island. He looks for

“something easily seen” on the sea to steer the ship. He soon recognizes something “[w]hite on the black water”: his hat, which “must have fallen off” Leggatt’s head, and is consequently used as “the saving mark for my eyes.” The hat serves “me for a mark to help out the ignorance of my strangeness” so that he feels the “perfect communion of a seaman with his first command” (213-14).

There are two points to consider as to the symbolic function of the hat. Firstly, although saved by the hat, which symbolizes Leggatt, the narrator now “hardly [thinks] of [his] other self” (214). The narrator on the ship cannot pick up the hat, “a vehicle for transposed identities,” floating on the sea (Erdinast-Vulcan 45). Its loss accordingly symbolizes the narrator’s parting from Leggatt. The other point is that the hat’s connection with Leggatt is consolidated by the manner of its reappearance. The narrator discovers the hat because a “phosphorescent flash passed under” it (213). This “phosphorescent flash” echoes the first corpse-like appearance of Leggatt, from whose “naked body” a “faint flash of phosphorescent light” seems “to issue” (178). The novella thus begins and ends with the same imagery of Leggatt—the “ghostly” man. The encounter with Leggatt has sown the seeds of self-reflection and self-understanding and culminates with the dramatic realization of the narrator’s maturity.

Each of the repetitive motifs in sections 5 and 6—the comparison of the command of the two ships; the representation of Koh-ring and the hat—gives coherence to the narrative: the narrator strategically impresses the reader with his recognition of his maturity. He recognizes his change from “a stranger to” the “ship” and “[him]self” (175) into “a seaman” with “the perfect communion” with “his first command” (214). The narrator therefore manages to handle Leggatt’s impact in his own narrative.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the narrator’s self-conscious narration,

which is apparently awkward, in fact allows him to interpret his days with Leggatt, his "other." In that narrative, the narrator can interpret his past and convince the readers to accept his attitude towards Leggatt.

In Conrad's earlier works, the narrators try to understand but are frustrated by their "others" with intense egoism and different values. Marlow, for example, is overwhelmed by Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness" or Jim in *Lord Jim*; or in *Under Western Eyes* the British teacher of languages is confounded by Razumov, a Russian youngster. In comparison with these narrators, the captain in "The Secret Sharer" assimilates his days with Leggatt into his own narrative of maturity. Emphasis should be placed on Leggatt's characterization. His "ghostly" aspects are resonant with his intense otherness. Nevertheless, the narrator manages to interpret and handle Leggatt's impact in his dramatization of his maturation. "The Secret Sharer" thus exemplifies Conradian ideal concerning how a person can understand and interpret an encounter with his or her "other."

Note

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